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DE RUEHPS #1117/01 3621344
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 281344Z DEC 06
FM USOFFICE PRISTINA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6878
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0974
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RUFOANA/USNIC PRISTINA SR

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PRISTINA 001117

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DEPT FOR DRL, INL, EUR/SCE
NSC FOR BRAUN
USUN FOR DREW SCHUFLETOWSKI
EUR/ACE FOR DMAYHEW

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: KOSOVO ASHKALI LEADERS THREATEN TO WITHDRAW FROM
INSTITUTIONS

REF: A. 2000 PRISTINA 4129

[1](#)B. 2000 PRISTINA 4371

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Pristina District Court sentenced Kosovo MP and President of the Ashkali Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDAK) Sabit Rrahmani to five months in prison for fraud. Fellow PDAK party leaders do not deny the charges, but told us that Ashkali are being targeted for prosecution, and warned us that if Rrahmani goes to prison, members of the Ashkali community will withdraw from Kosovo institutions, withdraw their children from schools, and organize violent protests. Although this is a hollow threat from a small and historically marginalized community, we urged these leaders not to contemplate extreme measures and to stay engaged with Kosovar institutions. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) According to court documents, the Municipal Court in Ferizaj/Urosevac convicted Ashkali MP Sabit Rrahmani of fraud and imposed a fine of 400 euros in June 2004. (NOTE. Ashkali are an Albanian-speaking ethnic minority often grouped together here with Roma and Egyptians. END NOTE.) Arguing that the sentence was too lenient, given the aggravating circumstances in which Rrahmani abused the trust placed in him as a public official by members of his community, the Chief Municipal Prosecutor appealed the sentence in July 2004. On November 9, 2006 the Pristina District Court sustained the appeal and imposed an aggregated sentence of five months imprisonment. According to court documents, Rrahmani did not exercise his right to appeal the previous decisions, but he still has the right to submit an extraordinary appeal to the Supreme Court. This was not Rrahmani's first brush with the law -- fellow Ashkali accused him of embezzlement as far back as 2000 (Ref A).

[1](#)3. (SBU) On December 15, three leaders of Rrahmani's Ashkali Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDAK) -- Avni Rama, Gzim Rama and Qerim Gara -- urged USOP to take action to prevent Kosovo

authorities from enforcing the prison sentence, which was scheduled to begin on December 27. They did not deny that Rrahmani committed the crimes, but insisted that he used the money to help his community. Rama said that Rrahmani has the full support of his community, who, he said, are gathering funds to help him repay his 184,000 euro debt. The party leaders warned that if Rrahmani goes to prison, the Ashkali community will withdraw from Kosovo institutions, take their children out of schools, organize violent protests and possibly leave Kosovo en masse. They insisted that his community needs him in the Assembly to represent their interests during the upcoming crucial stage in the status process. (NOTE. Because his prison term will be less than six months, Rrahmani will not lose his position as an MP. END NOTE.)

¶4. (SBU) The party leaders also claimed that Rrahmani was denied his right to appeal, and argued that Kosovo Albanian leaders who have committed far greater crimes and stolen much larger amounts of money walk free, while their leader is targeted for prosecution because he is a minority. They added that the police still have not solved the case in which four Ashkali were murdered, execution-style, in Skenderaj on November 8, 2000 (Ref B).

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT. USOP believes that the threat of violent protests from the Ashkali community is minimal, given that the community is small, widely dispersed, and the fraud victims are members of the community. If the Ashkali did act on these threats, it is likely that no one outside their community would notice. The fact that an MP has been prosecuted and convicted of fraud is a positive development. However, there is a strong perception among Kosovo's minorities that crimes against their communities often go unsolved, and that criminals in the majority community are

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not prosecuted. END COMMENT.

¶6. (U) Post clears this message in its entirety for release to Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.
LASKARIS